

Message Text

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PAGE 01 CANBER 06866 280924Z
ACTION HA-05

INFO OCT-01 EA-10 IO-13 ISO-00 VO-05 INSE-00 CIAE-00
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FM AMEMBASSY CANBERRA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4147
INFO AMEMBASSY MANILA
AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR
AMCONSUL HONG KONG
USMISSION GENEVA

C O N F I D E N T I A L CANBERRA 6866

EO 11652: GDS
TAGS: SREF VN AS
SUBJECT: GOA GUARANTEES FOR REFUGEES IN THIRD COUNTRY
TRANSIT CAMPS

REF: STATE 216564

1. EMBASSY DISCUSSED QUESTION OF TRANSIT CAMPS (REFTEL) WITH
IAN SIMINGTON (ASSTSEC, SPECIAL PROGRAMS & REFUGEES, DEPT OF
IMMIGRATION) IN ABSENCE OF VOLKER. SIMINGTON AND HOFFMAN
GAVE US INITIAL REACTION, BUT PROMISED TO GET BACK TO US WITHIN
NEXT TWO DAYS WITH MORE THOROUGHLY CONSIDERED VIEWS AFTER
CHECKING WITH ENGLEWOD AND/OR MINISTER MACKELLAR.

2. GOA'S INITIAL ENTHUSIASM FOR TRANSIT CAMPS HAS WANED,
ACCORDING TO SIMINGTON, WITH RECOGNITION THAT SUCH FACILITIES
WOULD BE AT BEST A TEMPORARY EXPEDIENT TO RELIEVE OVERCROWDING
AND CONCERN THAT BOTH THE CAMPS AND THE GUARANTEES IMPLIED WOULD
BE A COMPLICATING FACTOR FOR RELATIONS WITH COUNTRIES LIKE
MALAYSIA WHO ARE DOING WITHOUT SUCH GUARANTEES OR SPECIAL
TRANSIT CAMPS. GOA ACCEPTS THAT OVERCROWDING, PARTICULARLY
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IN MALAYSIA, IS A MATTER OF CONSIDERABLE CONCERN, BUT THEIR
CLEAR IMPRESSION IS THAT DESPITE THE GREAT INCREASE IN
NUMBERS OF REFUGEES OVER THE PAST SIX TO EIGHT WEEKS, THE
GOM'S ATTITUDE IS, IF ANYTHING, A BIT MORE RELAXED
THAN IT WAS EARLIER. GOA'S INTERPRETATION IS THAT AS THE
NUMBERS HAVE GROWN AND UNHCR HAS COPED WITH FEEDING/HOUSING/
INTERVIEWING, GOM HAS BECOME LESS APPREHENSIVE THAT IT IS

GOING TO HAVE TO HANDLE THE REFUGEES UNILATERALLY. (WE PROTESTED THAT THIS MIGHT BE TAKING TOO ROSY A VIEW OF UNHCR'S CAPABILITIES, A POINT SIMINGTON ACCEPTED BUT WITH THE PROVISIO THAT GOA'S IMPRESSION NONETHELESS REMAINS THAT THE GOM IS LESS ALARMED ABOUT THE PROBLEM TODAY THAN IT WAS TWO MONTHS AGO.) AUSTRALIANS HAVE RECEIVED CONSIDERABLE COOPERATION FROM MALAYSIAN AUTHORITIES IN PREVENTING REFUGEES FROM SAILING SOUTH, COOPERATION THEY ATTRIBUTE BOTH TO THE FACT THAT THEY ARE, AND ARE SEEN TO BE, ACTUALLY MOVING REFUGEES OUT OF MALAYSIA TO RESETTLEMENT IN AUSTRALIA, AND THE FACT THAT THEY SENT A MINISTERIAL-LEVEL DELEGATION (LED BY MACKELLAR) TO DISCUSS THE PROBLEMS WITH THE GOM.

3. IN ANY EVENT, SIMINGTON WAS CAREFUL NOT TO PREJUDICE THE ARGUMENT AGAINST TRANSIT CAMPS AND SAID HE WOULD SEE WHAT MOVEMENT HE COULD PRODUCE. HE DESCRIBED OFFICIAL GOA POLICY AT THIS POINT, HOWEVER, AS ONE OF UNDERTAKING NO RPT NO NEW INITIATIVES PRIOR TO WHAT IS NOW ANTICIPATED AS A FULL-SCALE GOA REVIEW OF THE SITUATION IN OCTOBER.

4. SIMINGTON ASKED WHETHER WE KNEW WHO WOULD BE REPRESENTING THE US AT THE FORTHCOMING "DISCUSSIONS" IN KUALA LUMPUR/ BANGKOK. HE SAID IT WOULD BE VERY HELPFUL IF WHOEVER IT IS COULD SWING BY CANBERRA BEFORE OR AFTERWARDS FOR A FURTHER EXCHANGE WITH GOA OFFICIALS, SIMILAR TO THE ONE WITH SHEP LOWMAN IN JUNE. EMBASSY HEARTILY CONCURS.
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5. FINAL POINT MADE BY SIMINGTON AND HOFFMAN, IN THE CONTEXT OF PRIVATE BILATERAL US ASSURANCES TO AUSTRALIA THAT WE WOULD MOST LIKELY ACCEPT REFUGEES IF GOA COULD ONLY GIVE "GUARANTEES" TO THIRD COUNTRY HOSTS TO TRANSIT CAMPS, WAS THAT GOA WAS BECOMING A BIT NERVOUS AT WORKING LEVELS ABOUT FAILURE OF THE US TO MOVE THE 44 OR SO REFUGEES IN AUSTRALIA THAT WE HAVE AGREED TO ACCEPT. BOTH POINTED OUT THAT WHILE THERE WAS NO PRESSING URGENCY, IT WAS BECOMING SOMETHING OF A HANDICAP FOR SYMPATHETIC ELEMENTS IN BOTH THE BUREAUCRACY AND POLITICAL LEVEL WHO HAVE ENDEAVORED TO ARGUE THE CASE FOR A BIGGER REFUGEE PROGRAM. SOME SIGN OF US MOVEMENT WOULD BE GREATLY WELCOMED.

6. ACTION REQUESTED: WOULD BE HELPFUL TO KNOW WHO WILL BE ATTENDING KUALA LUMPUR/BANGKOK DISCUSSIONS FOR US AND WHETHER THEY CAN SWING THROUGH HERE BEFORE OR AFTER; WOULD ALSO BE HELPFUL TO KNOW WHAT WE CAN TELL THE GOA ABOUT MOVEMENT OF US-BOUND REFUGEES IN AUSTRALIA.
ALSTON

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Message Attributes

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